

**ÁRMIN  
VÁMBÉRY**

A photograph of a traditional Chinese building, likely a temple or palace, with a prominent tiled roof. The building is illuminated at night, with warm lights from within and colorful lights (red, green, and blue) highlighting the architectural details. The roof features intricate carvings and a central finial. The background is dark, making the illuminated structure stand out.

**SKETCHES  
OF CENTRAL  
ASIA (1868)**

**Ármin Vámbéry**

# **Sketches of Central Asia (1868)**

**Additional chapters on my travels, adventures, and  
on the ethnology of Central Asia**

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# PREFACE.

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In the reviews of my "Travels in "Central Asia," which have issued from the European and American press, I have generally been reproached with scantiness of details and scrappiness of treatment;—in a word, with having said much less than I could have said about my journey from the Bosphorus to Samarkand,—so rich in varied adventures and experiences.

Now, I will not deny that such a charge has not been quite unfairly levelled against me.

While I was writing my memoirs, during the first three months of my stay in London, after my year-long wanderings in Asia, I had very great trouble in accustoming myself to the idea of being firmly settled down. I always kept fancying myself bound on the morrow to pack up and extend my travels with the caravan: hence my irresolution and hasty procedure. Moreover, I was quite a stranger in the domain of travelling, and deemed it my duty now to keep something back for mere decency; anon to leave out something else, as of inferior interest. Hence many an episode was left untouched, many a picture remained but a feeble sketch.

To make up for this defect—if sparingness in words be really a defect—I have written the following pages. They contain only supplementary papers, partly about my own adventures, partly on the manners and rare characteristics of the Central Asiatic peoples, linked together in no particular connection. It would naturally have been better to

offer these pages in the place of the former volume; and yet the slightest notice of a country so little known to us as Turkestan, which political questions will soon bring into the front of passing questions, will always have its uses; and "meglio tardi che mai."

A. V.

PESTH,

*2nd December, 1867.*

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## **SKETCHES OF CENTRAL ASIA.**

# CHAPTER I.

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## DERVISHES AND HADJIS.

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The dervish is the veritable personification of Eastern life. Idleness, fanaticism, and slovenliness, are the features which in him are regarded as virtues, and which everywhere are represented by him as such. Idleness is excused by allusion to human impotence; fanaticism explained as enthusiasm in religion; and slovenliness justified by the uselessness of poor mortals in struggling against fate. If the superiority of European civilization over that of the East was not so clearly established, I should almost be tempted to envy a dervish, who, clad in tatters and conversing in a corner of some ruined building, shows, by the twinkling in his eye, the happiness he enjoys. What a serenity is depicted in that face; what a placidity in all his actions; what a complete contrast there is between this picture and that presented by our European civilization! In my disguise as a dervish it was chiefly this unnatural composure which made me nervous, and in the imitation of which I made, of course, the greatest mistakes. I shall never forget one day at Herat, when, after reflecting on the happiness of the early termination of the painful mask I had been wearing for so many months, I suddenly jumped up from my seat, and in a somewhat excited state began to pace up and down the old ruin which gave me shelter. A few minutes afterwards I perceived that a crowd of passers by had collected at the



door, and that I was the object of general astonishment. Seeing my mistake, I blushingly resumed my seat. Soon afterwards several people came up to ask me what was the matter with me, whether I was well, &c. The good people thought I was deranged; for, to oriental notions, a man must be out of his senses if, without necessity or a special object in view, he suddenly leaves his seat to pace up and down a room.

As the dervish represents the general character, so he does the different peoples of the East. It is true, Mahomedanism enforces the dogma: "El Islam milleti wahidun"—all Islamites are *one* nation; but the origin and home of the different sects are easily recognised. Bektashi, Mewlewi, and Rufai, are principally natives of Turkey; because Bektash, the enthusiastic founder of the Janissaries, Moola Djelaleddin Rumi, the great poet of the Mesnevi, lived, and are buried in Turkey; the Kadrie and Djelali are most frequently met with in Arabia; the Oveisy, and Nurbakhshi Nimetullah in Persia; the Khilali and Zahibi in India; and the Nakishbendi and Sofi Islam in Central Asia. [1] The members of the different fraternities are bound together by very close ties; apprentices (Murid) and assistants (Khalifa) have to yield implicit obedience to the chief (Pir), who has an unlimited power over the life and property of his brethren. But these fraternities do not in the least trouble themselves about secret political or social objects, as is sometimes asserted in Europe by enthusiastic travellers, who have even discovered Freemasons amongst the Bedouin tribes of the Great Desert. The dervishes are the monks of Islamism; and the spirit which created and

sustains them is that of religious fanaticism, and they differ from each other only by the manner in which they demonstrate their enthusiasm. For instance; whilst one of these religious orders commands constant pilgrimages to the tombs of saints, the other lays down stringent rules for reflection on divine infinity and the insignificance of our existence. A third compels his votaries to occupy themselves day and night with repeating the name of God (Zikr) and hymns (Telkin); and it cannot surprise us to learn that the greater number of a company which has continually been calling out with all its might: "Ja hu! Ja hakk! La illahi illa hu! are seized with *delirium tremens*. The orthodox call this condition Medjzub; *i.e.*, carried away by divine love, or to be in ecstasy. A person to whom such a fortunate event happens, for as such it is regarded, is envied by everybody; and as long as it lasts, the sick and the maimed, and barren women, try to get in his immediate presence, taking hold of his dress,—as touching it is supposed to have healing powers.

What the dervishes are able to do during the ecstasy caused by *Zikr*, I had once an opportunity of witnessing in Samarkand. In Dehbid, close to the tomb of the Makhdun Aazam, one of these howling companies had grouped themselves around the Pir (chief) of that district. At first they contented themselves with repeating the formula in a natural tone of voice, and almost in measured time. The chief was lost in the deepest thought; all eyes and ears were fixed upon him; and every motion of his hand, and every breath he drew, was audible, and encouraged his followers to utter wilder and louder ejaculations. At last he seemed to

awake from his sleep-like reflections, and as soon as he raised his head all the dervishes jumped up from their seats like possessed beings. The circle was broken, and the different members began to dance in undulating motions; but hardly did the chief stand upon his feet than the enthusiastic dancers became so terribly excited that I, who had to imitate all their wild antics, became almost frightened. They were flying about, constantly dancing, right and left, hither and thither, some leaving the soft meadow and getting upon the rough stones, constantly dancing, till the blood began to run freely from their feet. Still they kept on their mad excitement, till most of them fell fainting to the ground.

In a country like the East, where such social relations exist, and where we meet with such amusing extremes, the dervish or beggar, though placed at the very bottom of the social scale, often enjoys as much consideration as the prince who reigns over millions and disposes of immense treasures. Man, an unresisting plaything in the powerful hand of Fate, can, if Destiny wills it, be transported from one extreme to the other, of which history furnishes us with numerous instances; and as in fiction we see with pleasure the two antipodes—the king, Shah-ü Keda, and the beggar, brought into close propinquity—even so we often find a ragged and dirty dervish, covered with vermin, sitting on the same carpet with a magnificently-dressed prince, and engaged with him in familiar conversation, nay, often drinking with him out of the same cup. European travellers view such a *tête-à-tête* with surprise, and even sometimes with a feeling of amusement; but in the East it is considered

as quite natural. For, says the oriental moralist, the king must see in the glaring contrast between him and his neighbour the vanity of earthly splendour, and banish from his mind all feeling of pride; while the dervish discovers beneath the pompous dress of the prince a mere mortal man, and mindful of the vanity of sublunary things, laughs at the farce of life.

Though perfectly conscious of their relative position, these two extremes exhibit, when they meet, an admirable degree of toleration and indulgence. The dervish, who, when received in private, behaves with the freedom and unconstraint of an intimate friend, never forgets on public occasions that he is the poorest of the poor. The man of rank suffers from him what to any other person would appear insupportable. At Kerki, the governor of the province had a dervish in his palace, who, in conformity with a precept of his order, had the agreeable office of crying aloud uninterruptedly, from sunset till break of day: Ya hu! ya hakk! La illa hu!<sup>[2]</sup> and that with the voice of a Stentor. As soon as darkness prevailed, and the busy hum of public life had become silent, the melancholy and monotonous exclamations became more and more audible, not only in the palace itself, but to a considerable extent around it. That his devotions disturbed many in their sleep, may be easily imagined. Nevertheless, the governor, notwithstanding the entreaties of his own family, did not venture to make any objection to this proceeding, and the dervish continued his vociferations every night as long as he sojourned in Kerki. As I lodged in the vicinity of the palace, I enjoyed my share of this nightly concert; and as the voice of the enthusiastic

bawler became towards the approach of dawn weaker and weaker, I was enabled to calculate from it the distance of daybreak without stepping out of the dark cell in which I lay.

We may say, however, that we nowadays very seldom meet with a dervish in the strict sense of the word; that is, a man who, renouncing from inward conviction earthly goods and worldly comforts, is desirous only of obtaining experience of life and devoting himself to the practice of religious duties: such a man, in a word, as the poet Saadi is represented to have been. Those who embrace this vocation are either unprincipled and lazy fellows, or professed beggars, who, under the cloak of poverty, collect treasures, and when they are sufficiently enriched often adopt some lucrative trade. This is particularly the case in Persia. So long as Fortune is favourable to them they lead a life of ostentatious magnificence, and forget how transitory all is in this world. But should he be overtaken by adversity, then he retires to some modest corner, rails at the vain pursuits of men, and, inflated with pride, cries out: Men dervish em; I am a dervish.

The dervishes of India, and particularly those of Cashmere, are throughout the East pre-eminent among their Mahometan brethren for cunning, secret arts, forms of exorcism, &c. These fellows impose most impudently on the credulity of the people in Persia and Central Asia, and even men of wit and understanding sometimes fall into their snares; for, wherever such a Cashmere dervish appears, gifted as he generally is with a noble figure, striking features, bright eloquent eyes, and long dark flowing hair, he is sure of success.

The Mahometans of India and the adjoining eastern countries have always been celebrated in the Islamite world for their supernatural gifts. As soon as such a travelling saint arrives in a Mahometan country, he is entreated to cure dangerous maladies, to exorcise ghosts, or to point out where hidden treasures are buried; for, although those arts are forbidden by the Koran, they appear everywhere as the most zealous Mahometans. Count Gobineau, in his work, "Trois Ans dans l'Asie," tells us of an excellent trick, which an alchemist from Cashmere played a gold-seeking prince in Teheran. A similar trick was played on the brother of the reigning Khan of Khiva, who, wanting to have all his saddles and bridles converted into gold, was cheated in a most ridiculous manner. But they are sometimes so devoid of conscience as to rob the poorest man of his last penny. In Teheran, a Hadji, lately arrived from Central Asia, told me, with tears in his eyes, the following story. As, said he, I had heard much in Meshed of the frequent robberies that occurred on the road to Teheran, I and my companion were anxious to know what would be the best way to conceal our little capital, which was to defray our expenses to the holy grave of the Prophet. This money was the savings of five hard years, and thou knowest how difficult it is to travel without money in this land of heretics. Next to us in the caravanserai at Meshed there lodged a pious Ishan (sheikh) from Cashmere; to him we communicated our fears, and were delighted when he offered, by means of a certain form of prayer, to secure our money against all attacks of robbers. He invited us to follow him to the mosque of Iman Riza: there he bade us perform the usual ablutions. We then

placed our money in his lap, and after he had breathed on it several times he put it with his own hands into our purses, wrapped them up in seven sheets of paper, and then strictly enjoined us not to open them till, on our arrival at Teheran, we had performed our devotions three times in the mosque. It is now six weeks since we left Meshed; and imagine our fright, when yesterday, after the third prayer, we opened our purses and found in them, instead of our dear ducats, nothing but heavy reddish sand. The poor fellows uttered bitter complaints and seemed almost to have lost their wits. The cunning rogue from Cashmere had, while pronouncing the blessing, changed the money without being perceived by the simple Tartars, who continued their journey to Teheran in the perfect persuasion of the efficacy of the ceremony,—a persuasion which they now found had cost them dear.

It is the same with dervishism as with all the other oriental institutions, customs and manners; the more we penetrate towards the East, the greater is the purity with which they have been preserved. In Persia the dervishes play a much more important part than in Turkey; and in Central Asia, isolated as it has been from the rest of the world for centuries, this fraternity is still in full vigour, and exercises a great influence upon society. In my "Travels," I have frequently alluded to the position occupied by the *Ishan* or secular priests in Central Asia. Their influence may be called a fortunate one, contrasted with the fearful tyranny existing in those countries. This is the reason why every one occupies himself with religion; every one tries to pass himself off as a worker of miracles (Ehli Keramet); or, if

he fails in that, he endeavours to be recognised as a saint (veli ullah ....) Those who make the interpretation of the sacred writings their business are great rivals of the *Ishans*, who, by the mysticism by which they surround themselves, enjoy a large share of popular esteem. The native of Central Asia, like the wildest child of Arabia, is more easily imposed upon by magic formulas and similar hocus-pocus than by books. He may dispense with the services of a Mollah, but he cannot do without a *Ishan*, whose blessing (*fatiha*) or breath (*nefes*) is required when he sets out on one of his predatory expeditions, and upon which he looks as a talismanic power, when moving about his herds, his tent, or the wilds of the desert.

After the *Ishans*, the most interesting class are the mendicant dervishes (*Kalenter*),<sup>[3]</sup> which the Kirguese and Turkomans call Kuddush<sup>[4]</sup> or Divani (insane). In the whole of the great deserts which stretch from the eastern boundaries of China to the Caspian Sea, it is only these people, in their ragged dress, who are able to move unmolested. They do not take any notice of the differences of tribe or family, and the mighty words, *Yaghi* or *Il* (friend or enemy) have to them no meaning. In travelling along they join whomsoever they meet, be it a peaceful caravan or band of *robbers*. The dervishes who travel through Kirguese or Turkoman steppes are generally this class of people, who form a strong inclination to do nothing, follow a trade which throughout the East is considered respectable, viz., that of a mendicant. All they have to acquire is a few prayers and a certain power of mimicry, with which the chiromantic feats are performed; and I have never seen a nomad who has not



been moved when he found himself in the close presence of one of those long-haired, bare-headed, and bare-footed dervishes, who, with his fiery eyes, stared hard at the son of the desert, and whilst shaking his Keshkul[5] howled a wild "*Ja hu!*"

The arrival of one of these fakirs in a lonely group of tents is regarded as a joyful event, or almost a festival; it is of especial importance in the eyes of the women; and the time of his arrival is differently interpreted. Early in the morning signifies the happy birth of a camel or a horse; at noon a quarrel between husband and wife; and in the evening a good prospect of marriage to the marriageable daughters. The dervish is generally taken in hand by the women, and is well supplied with the best things the tent contains, in hopes that he may be tempted to produce from beneath his battered dress some glass beads, or other talisman. Alms, which amongst the nomads seldom consist of money, are rarely denied him; and he often receives an old carpet, a few handfuls of camel hair or wool, or an old garment. He may also stop with the family for days, and move about with it without his presence becoming a burden. If the dervish possesses musical talent, *i.e.*, able to sing a few songs and accompany himself on the two stringed instrument called dutara, he is made much of, and has the greatest difficulty in getting away from the hospitable host.

It is very seldom that dervishes are insulted or ill-treated; this, however, is said to be the case amongst the Turkomans, whose rapacity knows no bounds, and prompts them to commit incredible acts of cruelty. A dervish from Bokhara, of robust figure and dark curly hair, whom I met at

Maymene, told me that a Tekke-Turkoman, prompted by the thirty ducats which his athletic figure promised to fetch in the slave market, made him a prisoner to sell him a few days afterwards. "I pretended," my colleague continued, "to be quite unconcerned, and repeated the *Zikr* whilst shaking my iron chains. The time was fast approaching when I was to be taken to the market, when suddenly the wife of the robber of my liberty and person was taken ill, and prevented him from starting. He seemed to see in this the finger of God, and began to be pensive, when his favourite horse, refusing to eat his food, showed signs of illness." This was enough. The robber was so frightened that he removed the chains of his prisoner, and returned to him the things he had robbed him of, begging him to leave his tent as soon as possible. Whilst a Turkoman impatiently awaited the departure of the ominous beggar, the latter fumbled about his dress, and pretended that he had lost a comb which his chief had given him as a talisman on the road, and without which he could not go a single step. The nomad returned in great haste to the place where the plunder had been kept, and as the comb did not turn up he became still more frightened, and promised the dervish the price of twenty combs if he would only take a single step beyond the boundary of his tent. The cunning bush-rite saw he was master of the situation; he pretended to be inconsolable about the lost property, and declared that he now would have to remain for years in the tent. Imagine the confusion of the deceived and superstitious robber! Like a madman he ran about asking his neighbour for advice. Formal negotiations were now commenced with the dervish, to

whom, finally, a horse, a dress, and ten ducats were presented, to make up for the loss of the comb, and on condition that he should leave a tent whose proprietor will probably think twice before he ventures again upon molesting a travelling dervish.

Besides the dervishes who, as physicians, miracle-working saints, or harmless vagabonds, are wandering about in Central Asia, there is a class called "*Khanka neshin*," or convent dwellers, who always wish to appear as the poorest, and are without doubt the most contemptible fellows in the world. Generally speaking they are opium eaters, who by their excessive filth, skeleton-like body, and frightfully distorted features, present a most repulsive appearance. The worst is that they do not confine themselves to practising this fearful vice themselves, but with a singular persistency endeavour to make converts amongst all classes; and, supported by the want of spirituous drinks, they succeed but too frequently in their wicked attempts. What surprised me most was that these wretched people were regarded as eminently religious, of whom it was thought that from their love to God and the Prophet they had become mad, and stupefied themselves in order that in their excited state they might be nearer the Beings whom they loved so well.

Speaking of dervishes we may mention a class of hypocrites who, under the pretence of carrying out sacred vows, indulge in their desire to travel, and after their return assume, under the title of Hadji (Pilgrims) authority and a good social position. The Koran says, "*Hidji ala beiti min isti Itaaton sebila*"—Wander to my house (*Kaaba*) if

circumstances permit. These "circumstances" are reduced to the following seven conditions by the commentators. The pilgrimage must be undertaken, 1st,—With sufficient money for travelling expenses; 2nd,—In bodily health; 3rd,—In an unmarried state; 4th,—Without leaving debts behind; 5th,—In times of peace; 6th,—Overland and without danger; and, 7th,—By persons who have reached the age of puberty. That our good Tartars ill-observe these conditions will be evident to all who have some idea about the countries situated between Oxus and Yaxartes. In Persia people go to Kerbela, Meshed or Mekka, only when sufficient funds enable them to do it comfortably. In Central Asia, on the contrary, it is always the poorest class who undertakes pilgrimages. A certain taste for adventure, coupled with religious enthusiasm, are the two motives which prompt the inhabitants of Central Asia to start from the remote east for the tomb of their Prophet. True, they do not suffer any material losses, for a beggar's bag is a money bag; but they frequently lose what is most precious to them—their life; as every year at least one-third of the pilgrims from Turkestan die from exposure to the climate.

This sacred or profane desire to travel braves all danger; this vague thought of tearing himself away from his family, and friends, and countrymen, to see the wide world, surrounds the Hadji with a certain poetry. I have lived weeks with my companions, and yet it always interested me to behold them, palm staff in hand, as a sacred memento of Arabia, vigorously making their way through the deep sand or mud. They were returning happily to their homes; but how many did I meet who only commenced their long and

tedious journey? and yet they were equally happy. On my road from Samarkand to Teheran I had as a companion a native of Chinese Tartary, who, in total ignorance of the route he had to take, asked me every evening, even when we were yet at Meshed, whether we should see to-morrow, or at the farthest after to-morrow, the minarets of Mekka. The poor fellow had no idea how much he would have to endure before he reached his destination. However, this should not surprise us when we remember that during the time of the crusades so many honest Teutons undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and after two or three days' journey hoped to behold the walls of Jerusalem.[6]

The routes to Arabia adopted by the pious Tartars are the following, viz.:—1. Yarkend, Kilian, Tibet, Kashmir.[7] 2. Through Southern Siberia, Kazan and Constantinople. 3. Through Afghanistan and India to Djedda. 4. Through Persia, Bagdad, and Damascus. None of these routes is a comfortable one, and the amount of danger to be incurred is very much dependent upon the season of the year and the political state of the countries through which they pass. The travellers form themselves in larger or smaller companies, and elect a chief (*Tchaush*) from amongst themselves, who also fills amongst them the office of *Imam*, (the person who first says the prayers to be repeated by the rest,) and who enjoys a considerable superiority over his companions. A visit to the Kaaba and the tomb of the Prophet (which may be paid at any season) is not so much the culminating point of the whole pilgrimage as the ascent of Mount Arafat. This can be made only once a year, viz., on the Kurban festival, (10th Zil Hidje,) which is nothing more or less than the

sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac dramatized. All those who have taken part in this festival and have joined in the cry, "Lebeïk Allah!"—Command, Oh God," (in allusion to Abraham's implicit obedience,) are regarded as genuine Hadjis. This cry of "Lebeïk! Lebeïk!" uttered at the most solemn moment of the whole pilgrimage, seems also to have the deepest impression upon the pilgrim himself. My travelling companions, whenever they became excited or were in a happy mood of mind, always alluded to it; and the stillness of the Tartar deserts was often broken by this *memento* of the stony districts of Arabia.

However painful and heartrending separation from home may be when so long and dangerous a journey has to be undertaken, the joy which the Hadjis experienced on their return fully counterbalances it. Friends and relations, informed of his near arrival, go out to meet them several days in advance. Hymns are sung, and tears of joy are shed when the Hadji makes his entry into his native place. Every one wants to embrace him, to touch him, for the atmosphere of holy places still surrounds him, the dust of Mekka and Medina still covers his garments. In Central Asia the Hadji is held in much greater esteem than in any other Mohammedan country. It has cost him much to obtain his dignity, but he is amply repaid. Respected and supported by his fellow citizens he is better protected against the tyranny of the Government than any other citizen. The title of a "Hadji" is a patent of nobility, which, during his lifetime, he parades on his seal, after death on his tombstone.

The Hadjis, of course such as are not mere beggars, often transact, during their pious pilgrimage, a little commercial

business. "*Hem tidjared hem ziaret.*"—"Commerce and pilgrimage together" are not allowed by their religion; but nobody seems to suffer any pricks of conscience in taking to his co-religionist in Arabia a few articles from distant Turkomania. The products of Bokhara and other holy places of Central Asia are in high esteem amongst the people of Arabia; besides, every one wishes to show a Hadji some favour, and is easily induced to pay double the value for any article offered. This small trade is carried on between the easternmost point of Islamitic Asia to the Galata bridge of Constantinople. Amongst the crowd of that famous capital one often sees a Tartar, whose features contrast as strangely with the rest of the population as the colours of the thin silk kerchief differ from those of our European manufacture. Fine ladies seldom become purchasers of such articles, but old matrons are frequently seen, inspired by feelings of piety, paying a good price for them, pressing them repeatedly to their faces and forehead while repeating a loud "*Allahum u Sella,*" and continuing their walk.

That the successful sale of the exported articles leads to the importation of similar merchandize needs no confirmation. No Hadji leaves the holy places without making some purchases. At Mekka he lays in a stock of scents, dates, rosaries and combs, but especially water from the sacred well called Zemzem.[8] In Jamba and Djedda are bought European goods; these go by the name of Mali Istambul—"Stamboul Goods;" as the unbelieving Franks must not obtain credit for anything, and they consist of penknives, scissors, needles, thimbles, &c. Aleppo and Damascus enjoy the reputation of supplying the best

misvak, a fibrous root, used as tooth brushes by all pious Moslems. In Bagdad are bought a hirka, made of camel's hair, and of superior quality at this place, as it is this kind of garment which the Prophet is said to have worn next his skin. Finally, in Persia, ink, powder and pens made of canes are purchased. In Central Asia all these articles are great curiosities, and they are paid for handsomely, partly from necessity, partly from religious motives.

Generally speaking a caravan of Hadjis, I mean one whose character has been well inquired into, are the best travelling companions one can have in Central Asia, or rather in the whole of the east, provided one can manage to agree with them. With regard to the travelling necessaries the Hadji is well supplied, and it was always surprising to me to see how a man who had only one poor donkey he could call his own, could make a display of a separate tea-service[9] (à la Tartar,) Pilou-apparatus, and carpet when arrived at the station at which we halted. Nobody is more clever than a Hadji in negotiating, be the people he has to deal with believers or unbelievers, nomads or agricultural tribes. A Hadji may be converted into anything, he being thoroughly penetrated by the principle "*Si fueris Romae.*" Instead of being cast down and gloomy, as his ragged exterior would lead us to suppose, he is of a merry disposition, and during the long marches the greatest saint and miracle-worker occasionally indulges in a profane joke. The comicality of these generally serious faces has often made me forget the privations which I was myself undergoing.

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## **CHAPTER II.**

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## **RECOLLECTIONS OF MY DERVISH LIFE.**

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On the evening of the 27th of March, 1863, my excellent friend, the Turkish ambassador in Teheran, gave me a farewell supper, at which all declared—to inspire me, of course with fear, and divert me from my adventurous undertaking,—that I was for the last time in my life to enjoy European food in the European manner. The handsome dining room at the residence of the ambassador was brilliantly lighted, the choicest viands were served, and the choicest wines handed round; for the intention was clear,—to give me a strong dose of reminiscences of European comforts on the difficult expedition before me. My friends were for ever scrutinizing my features, to discover whether my outward appearance might not betray some trace of inward excitement. But they were very much mistaken. I had ensconced myself comfortably in the velvet arm chair, which had been brought thither from the distant land of the Franks; the wine had tinged my face with the same colour as the fez which covered my head. A pious dervish and wine—what a frightful antithesis! To-night, however, I must transgress, the penance will be a long one, whether or no....

Twenty-four hours later, in the evening of the 28th of March, I was in the midst of my company of beggars on the road to Lar, in a half-dilapidated mud hut, called Dagaru.

The rain was pouring in torrents. We had been pretty well wetted through during our day's march, so that all were anxious for shelter and a dry roof; and, the space being narrow, fate brought me the very first evening into the closest contact with my travelling companions. Their tattered garments, never very sweet-scented, and now thoroughly soaked with the rain, gave out the strangest evaporations; and no wonder if, under such circumstances, I had no great desire to take my share out of the large wooden bowl, from which the starved Hadjis, splashing about with their fists, were eating their supper. Moreover, hunger tormented me less than fatigue and my wet, ragged garments, to which I was as yet unaccustomed. Rolled up like a ball, I tried to get to sleep; but this also was impossible, packed together as we were in such close quarters. Now I felt the hand, now the head of one of my neighbours, falling upon me; then my opposite companion stretched out his foot, to scratch me behind the ears. It required the patience of Job to defend myself against these unpleasant civilities; and yet I might have had some sleep, but for the loud snoring of the Tartars, and above all the loud moaning of a Persian muleteer, who was sadly troubled with the gout.

Finding that all endeavours to close my eyes remained unsuccessful, I rose and sat upright in the midst of this mass of people, who were lying about in the most utter confusion. The rain kept falling, and, as I looked out into the dark and gloomy night, my thoughts returned to the difference in my position only twenty-four hours before, and the sumptuous farewell supper at the splendid Turkish embassy. The whole

scene appeared to me not unlike a dramatic representation of "King and Beggar," in which I acted the chief part. The bitter feeling of reality, however, made little impression. I myself was the author of this sudden metamorphosis, and I had prepared my fate for myself.

The hard task of self-control lasted but a few days. As far as all outward peculiarities were concerned, I soon became familiar with the habitual as well as physical attributes of dervishism, such as dirt, &c. I gave my better garments, which I had brought with me from Teheran, to a weak and sickly Hadji, an act of kindness which gained all hearts. My new uniform consisted of a felt jacket, which I wore next my skin without any shirt, and of a *djubbe* (upper garment),<sup>[10]</sup> composed of innumerable pieces of stuff, and fastened with a cord round the loins. My feet were enveloped in rags, and an immense turban covered my head, serving as a parasol by day and pillow by night. I had also, in conformity with the rest of the Hadjis, hung round me a voluminous Koran in a bag, which resembled a cartridge pouch; and, viewing myself thus, "*en pleine parade*," I had reason proudly to exclaim: "Yes, indeed, I am born a beggar!"

The outer or material part of the *incognito* was thus easily assumed, but the moral part presented more serious difficulties than I expected. Although I had had the opportunity, for some years past, of studying the contrast between European and Asiatic modes of life, and the critical position in which I found myself made it incumbent upon me ever to be strictly on my guard, nevertheless, I could not avoid committing many glaring mistakes. The difference between Eastern and Western society does not consist

merely in language, physiognomy, and dress. We Europeans eat, drink, sleep, sit, and stand, nay, I feel inclined to say, laugh, weep, sigh, and gesticulate otherwise than Eastern people. These things are visible trifles, but in reality difficult ones, and yet they are as nothing when compared with the effort required to disguise one's feelings. When travelling, people are naturally of a more eager and excitable temperament than in everyday life, and therefore it costs the European an unspeakable effort to conceal his curiosity, admiration, or any kind of emotion, when brought into intercourse with the indolent orientals, who are for ever indifferent to all and everything around them. Besides, the object of my travelling was merely to travel, whilst that of my friends was to reach their distant homes. My individual person excited their interest only during the first moments of our acquaintance, while to me they were each a continual study; and it certainly can never have entered the head of any one of them that, whenever we laughed and joked most intimately together my mind would just then be doubly occupied. No one but he who is practically acquainted with the East, can have any idea of the difficulty of entering into all these marked differences. I had been pretty well schooled by a four years' residence at Constantinople; yet there I played merely the part of an amateur, whilst here I dared not deviate even a hair's breadth from reality. Nay, I will make no secret of the fact, that during the first few days the struggle, though short, was severe, and that repentance and remorse seized me at every fresh difficulty. However, my mind, being stimulated by vanity, was in that state of excitement when everything had to give way before the

irresistible impulse of its ardour; and, supported in its triumph by a sound constitution, it was enabled to bear easily whatever might happen.

I shudder even now when I think back of the fatigue I underwent during the first few days, and how much I suffered from the wet and cold, the uncleanliness—which makes one's hair stand on end—and the never-ending, harassing worry with the fanatic Shiites, during our long and tedious day-marches in Mazendran, a part of the world of historical reputation for its bad roads. Sometimes it rained from early in the morning until late in the evening, and, whilst not a thread of my tattered garments remained dry, I was moreover obliged to wade for hours knee-deep in mud. The narrow mountain-path has become hollow by the wear of centuries, and in many places it resembles a muddy brook, winding along between huge fragments of pointed rock that have fallen from the heights above. It is a sheer impossibility to remain in the saddle; and, in order to avoid danger, the best course is to tread slowly and cautiously, sounding the hollows with one's foot. No one will doubt that, under such circumstances, we arrived at the station at nightfall thoroughly exhausted and fatigued. Fire and shelter are the chief objects of desire, for which the eye looks longingly around. They both exist in Mazendran; but we, the Sunnitic beggars, had preferred, for the sake of quiet, to pass the night undisturbed and far from any human dwelling. A fire was kindled, to dry ourselves and our clothes, when the elder of our Tartar fellow-travellers observed, that such a proceeding would be prejudicial to health; and, indeed, they always preferred to dry

themselves in another and more singular fashion. It is well known that, throughout the East, horse dung is dried and then ground into powder, to serve as stabling for the horses by night. During the day it is exposed to the sun, either spread out or made into conical-shaped heaps; and I was not a little astonished to see how my companions, divesting themselves entirely of their apparel, buried their soaked bodies up to the neck in such like *poudre de santé*. I need not add, that contact with this *poudre*, so well known as strong and stinging, cannot be very agreeable; but its effects are only felt during the first quarter of an hour, and I can assert, from my subsequent personal experience, that such a bed induces a most sweet and refreshing sleep, however it may offend the European eye and sense of refinement.

In spite of the drawbacks, I should have felt quite contented with my lot had it not been that, besides these fatigues common to all, an extra share was allotted to me, being a stranger in the company. As such, it was my duty to affect the qualities of modesty and devotion, to show myself not only friendly, but submissive, to all; and to endeavour to conciliate the affection of old and young, by professing an obliging disposition, and a readiness to perform any kind of small service. At first these offers were declined by most of them, since they did not wish to offend in me the character of "efendi," having made my acquaintance as such. However, it was my duty in no case to yield, but on the contrary, to strive continually to make myself useful to one or the other. Besides the minor services I performed on the march, I had to try to be helpful to every one at the station,